

Shipping & Receiving

Etiquette Tips for Stallion and Mare Owners Handling Shipped Semen



Foaling season is one of my favorite times of year. It holds the promise of new life and all of the endless possibilities that come with bringing a precious Gypsy Vanner foal into the world. While the foal is always the goal, a successful foaling season must first be preceded by an equally successful breeding season.

For both stallion and mare owners, the prospect of dealing with shipped semen can feel a little daunting. It is a process that requires preparation, good communication, and a working understanding of equine reproduction. Advances in reproductive technology have made it possible for mare owners to access stallions that may once have been out of reach due to geography, scheduling, or travel limitations. That progress has created tremendous opportunity, but it has also introduced its own set of responsibilities.

The goal of this article is to offer practical insight into the roles and responsibilities of both stallion owners and mare owners when working with shipped semen. Every veterinarian and breeding facility may have its own preferred protocols, but one rule applies across the board: communication is key. When both parties understand what is expected of them and work together professionally, the breeding season runs more smoothly for everyone involved.

“The foal is the goal, but success starts long before foaling season.”



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The Stallion Owner

Having a solid, well-thought-out breeding contract is foundational when standing a stallion to the public. A breeding contract should clearly outline important details such as the stud fee and booking fee, the requirements of any Live Foal Guarantee, whether there is a cutoff date for the breeding season, how much notice is required for collections and shipments, the cost of collection and shipping, and which days semen is available to be shipped. It should also specify whether the mare owner must provide a clean culture or other reproductive exam before the first shipment, or only after a certain number of unsuccessful attempts. Reviewing your contract at the end of each breeding season and updating or streamlining it where needed is always a good practice. A strong contract saves time, trouble, and confusion later while helping foster a positive and professional relationship between stallion owner and mare owner.



Another important decision is determining where and by whom your stallion will be collected. Will the stallion stand at your farm and be hauled to a veterinarian or breeding facility as needed, or will he stand full-time at a stallion station for the season? Do your homework when selecting who will handle your stallion's breeding work, because that individual or facility will, to some extent, become the public face of your stallion and your program. Mare owners may be dealing with them directly to order semen, return containers, ask questions, or voice concerns. Working with someone knowledgeable, professional, and experienced can make your entire breeding season run more smoothly. Before the season begins, be sure you understand that facility's requirements, fees, collection days, cutoff times, and policies regarding last-minute requests, weekend shipments, or after-hours collections. There is a good chance these situations will arise during the season, and you need to know in advance what you can realistically offer and communicate clearly to mare owners.

Once you have your collection arrangements in place, it is time to think about clean-out collections and semen analysis. These should ideally be done a few weeks before your first scheduled shipment of the season. A stallion's semen quality, concentration, and sensitivity can vary from year to year, which is why beginning the season with a proper semen analysis is so important. There are a variety of semen extenders available, and not every extender works equally well for every stallion. What worked best one year may not work quite as well the next. A good semen analysis not only helps identify which extender your stallion ships best in, but also provides valuable information about his concentration and progressive motility. This is helpful information to have on hand for mare owners and their veterinarians, and it also allows you to compare numbers from one season to the next so that subtle health or fertility changes do not go unnoticed.

Starting the season well prepared sets your stallion, your business, and your mare owners up for success. Problems may still arise from time to time, but preparation gives you the tools to handle them professionally. As a stallion owner, you are your stallion's advocate. Be mindful about keeping his information up to date on your website, social media, and promotional materials. Make it easy for mare owners to reach you or your stallion manager, and be prompt in returning inquiries. Mare owners appreciate responsiveness, and that effort goes a long way toward building loyal, happy customers.

STALLION OWNER ESSENTIALS

- Clear breeding contract
- Reliable collection and shipping logistics
- Season-opening semen analysis
- Prompt, professional communication

The Mare Owner

Kick your breeding season off on the right hoof by beginning with a mare that is in good health and proper body condition. Whether or not the stallion owner requires it, it is a smart idea to have a breeding soundness exam and culture performed by your veterinarian before you ever order semen. Covering these bases in advance can save time, expense, and frustration later by reducing the likelihood of repeated shipments and preventable setbacks. Your veterinarian, the stallion owner, and everyone else directly involved in the process will appreciate working with a mare owner who comes prepared.

Once your mare is ready, you have selected the ideal stallion, and it is time to sign the contract and begin working toward that perfect foal, the most important rule is simple: read your contract. Do not skim it. Read it carefully, and ask questions if anything needs clarification. The breeding contract is there to protect both parties. It should spell out the rights, responsibilities, and expectations of both the stallion owner and the mare owner. Ideally, it should address nearly every issue that might arise during the course of the breeding relationship. Ask yourself, “What if...?” and then make sure the answer can be found in the contract. If a contract feels heavily one-sided, such as offering no Live Foal Guarantee, no protection if the stallion becomes unavailable due to death, sterility, or long-term illness, or unreasonable expenses and restrictions, think twice before booking.



This is where the importance of communication really comes into play. Most contracts require 24 to 48 hours' notice to order semen, allowing the stallion owner time to make collection and shipping arrangements. By this stage, you should already be watching your mare's cycle closely, either through teasing, ultrasound monitoring, or both. Let the stallion owner know as soon as your mare comes in so they can anticipate your needs and plan accordingly. This becomes especially important if the stallion is also being shown, is breeding a busy book of mares, or is standing at an outside facility with strict scheduling requirements. Most stallion owners understand that mares do not always read the calendar and that short cycles or unexpected ovulations do happen, but those exceptions should never be counted on. Proper mare management matters just as much as stallion management, and shipped cooled semen is often less forgiving than people realize when timing is poor. It is always in everyone's best interest to give your mare the best possible chance to settle quickly and efficiently.

If you receive a shipment in a returnable container, send it back promptly. Delayed returns can lead to late fees and can create problems for the stallion owner or breeding facility if they are waiting on containers for other shipments. Just as importantly, return the container clean. Do not send back used syringes, semen bags, ice packs covered in

spilled extender, or any unused dose that should have been disposed of properly by your veterinarian. Remember that extenders are often milk-based, and what leaves the breeding farm clean and cold can return anything but if it is not handled properly. Good container etiquette may sound small, but it matters.

Once your mare has been bred, work with your veterinarian to determine the proper day for a pregnancy check, and communicate the results promptly to the stallion owner. This allows them to close out your file if the mare is in foal or prepare for another collection and shipment if she is not. Good communication, patience, and a little humor go a long way during breeding season. The foal is the goal, and when everyone works together, it is a very attainable one.

BEFORE YOU ORDER SEMEN

- Confirm your mare's health and body condition
- Complete a breeding soundness exam and culture
- Read the contract carefully
- Track the cycle and give proper notice

Frozen Semen: Similar Goal, Different Rules

Frozen semen has expanded breeding possibilities even further, giving mare owners access to bloodlines that may be across the country, overseas, unavailable for fresh collection, or even from stallions that are no longer living. It can be an excellent tool, but it is important to understand that frozen semen is not simply the same process as cooled shipped semen. It comes with a different set of expectations, tighter timing, and even less room for error.

For mare owners, the first and most important question is whether your veterinarian is comfortable and experienced with frozen semen protocols. Frozen semen is far less forgiving when it comes to timing, and success often depends on very close monitoring

of the mare as she approaches ovulation. This can mean more frequent ultrasounds, more precise coordination, and, in some cases, after-hours or weekend veterinary involvement. Before you ever purchase frozen semen, make sure you understand your veterinarian's protocol, availability, and fees so that you are prepared both practically and financially.

Handling frozen semen also requires a higher level of care and professionalism. Frozen semen is typically stored in a liquid nitrogen tank and should be handled only by experienced veterinary or breeding professionals. It is not something that should be casually opened, moved around unnecessarily, or allowed to sit while decisions are being made. From storage to thawing to insemination, every step matters.

For stallion owners, clear communication is just as essential with frozen semen as it is with cooled shipments, if not more so. Frozen semen contracts should clearly define how many straws make up a breeding dose, where the semen



is stored, how it will be shipped or transferred, whether multiple attempts are allowed from one purchase, and what happens with unused doses. These details need to be spelled out clearly, because misunderstandings regarding inventory, usage, and rebreeds can become expensive very quickly.

It is also worth remembering that not all frozen semen performs equally well. Post-thaw quality can vary from stallion to stallion, and conception rates depend on more than just the stallion himself. The quality of the freezing process, the mare's reproductive health, the skill of the veterinarian, and the precision of timing all play major roles. Frozen semen can absolutely produce excellent results, but it rewards preparation and precision. It is not a process where anyone benefits from guessing, hoping, or scrambling at the last minute.

As with cooled semen, communication remains the key. Mare owners should keep the stallion owner informed about breeding dates, pregnancy checks, and whether additional doses may be needed. Stallion owners should make sure the mare owner understands the contract, the logistics, and the expectations before the breeding season is underway. Frozen semen can be a wonderful option, but it requires teamwork from everyone involved.

FROZEN SEMEN BASICS

- Tighter timing and closer monitoring
- Experienced veterinary handling
- Clear straw counts and contract terms
- Precision matters at every step

Final Thoughts

Whether you are working with cooled shipped semen or frozen semen, the same basic principles apply: preparation, professionalism, and communication. Good contracts, realistic expectations, careful mare management, and prompt follow-through make the process more successful for everyone involved.

Just as importantly, communication needs to extend beyond only the stallion owner and mare owner. A successful breeding season often depends on a full team effort that may also include veterinarians, collection centers, breeding managers, and anyone else directly involved in the process. The more clearly everyone communicates, shares expectations, and keeps one another informed, the less room there is for misunderstandings, missed timing, unnecessary stress, and costly mistakes.

Breeding season can be exciting and rewarding, but it can also be hectic, fast-moving, and at times unpredictable. Mares do not always cooperate on a perfect schedule, and shipments do not always go exactly as planned. That is why patience and a little grace with one another matter so much. When everyone approaches the process with professionalism, flexibility, and a willingness to work together, the entire experience becomes more efficient and far less frustrating.

There is also tremendous value in sharing knowledge. Sometimes something as simple as discussing expectations in advance, passing along a helpful resource, or making sure everyone involved understands the contract and the plan can make a meaningful difference. When stallion owners, mare owners, veterinarians, and breeding professionals are all on the same page and working toward the same goal, the breeding season is far more likely to run smoothly.

In the end, the foal is still the goal. And when everyone involved is prepared, informed, and committed to clear communication and teamwork, they give themselves the best possible chance of turning a breeding season into a healthy foal on the ground.